

A NOTE ON *CENTROSEMA VIRGINIANUM* (L.) BENTH.

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ABSTRACT

This note provides a full description of *centrosema virginianum* (L.) Benth. (with a plate), an introduced ornamental plant from tropical America now spreading in the Forests of Tenmalai. The history of its introduction and nomenclature is also briefly discussed.

During a botanical exploration of Tenmalai forest in Kerala State, a papilionaceous climber extensively spreading over *Eupatorium odoratum* and other shrubs, was collected and identified as *Centrosema virginianum* Benth. The identification was made with reference to Bailey (1942) who has described this as a hardy perennial vine (wild in Virginia) and very early introduced as a cultigen in American gardens. Further the specimen was compared with a microfiche photograph of a specimen in the Linnean herbarium and later confirmed by comparison with a specimen in the Central National Herbarium, Calcutta.

The generic name *Centrosema* was adopted by Benth after De Candolle, to accommodate plants originally included under *Clitoria*, but characterised by a gibbous or spurred calyx, and narrow pods with emphatic marginal nerves. The name *Centrosema* has been conserved (1956) over the earlier less well-known Rafinesquian name of *Bradburya*. Accordingly all references to our plant in earlier literature, are under *Clitoria*. Thus Joseph Paxton (1849) mentions this as introduced to gardens in England as early as 1732. Roxburgh (1814) and Voigt (1845) both have recorded the introduction of this American plant to the Calcutta Botanic garden, in the early 19th century. After that there is no mention of this plant in Indian botanical literature. Obviously the plants have now got acclimatised to our tropical conditions, and escaping from cultivation, have now begun to grow wild in forest areas. These have been collected not only from the Tenmalai forests, but also from the forests in Coorg district of Mysore State. As there is no adequate description of this interesting "Garden-Escape" for reference to Indian Botanists, a comprehensive description (with a plate) based on detailed study of several specimens from different spots in Tenmalai forest, is now provided. We have very little data on the area and speed of naturalisation of adventive plants and it would be interesting to observe the future of *Centrosema virginianum* (L.) Benth. in the forests of Kerala and

elsewhere. The present account may stimulate discovery of other areas for this *Centrosema*.

CENTROSEMA VIRGINIANUM (L.) BENTH. in Ann. Wien. Mus. 2:120, 1838. *CLITORIA VIRGINIANA* Linn. Sp. Pl. 753, 1753.

Straggling twiner. *Stems* slender, distantly branched, longitudinally grooved, brownish tomentose; internodes 5-10 cm. long. *Leaves* alternate trifoliate; stipules small, linear; rachis 3.5-6.0 cm. long, striate, tomentose; leaflets puberulous on the veins and veinlets on the ventral surface, glabrous on the dorsal surface; margins entire, ciliate; secondary nerves up to 7 pairs; rachinula 1.5-2.0 mm. long, venation pinnately reticulate; lateral leaflets slightly assymmetric at the base, ovate, acute at the apex, 3-6 cm. long, 1.8-3.0 cm. wide; stipels linear, scaly. *Flowers* 2-3, with pedicels about 5 mm. long, clustered on axillary peduncles, the peduncle 4-5 cm. long, tomentose; bracts small, scaly linear, striate, puberulous outside, 6-7 mm. long, 2 mm. wide; bracteoles ovate, acute or acuminate, puberulous outside, 6-7 mm. long, 2 mm. wide. *Calyx* campanulate at base, five-lobed above, the median anterior lobe elongated to a spur 6 mm. long, 1 mm. wide, sparsely puberulous. *Corolla* papilionaceous, usually dark violet, sometimes varying from pale violet to white; standard broadly ovate, obtuse, auriculate at the base with darker violet streaks radiating from the auricles inside, scarcely puberulous outside, up to 4 cm. long, 2.5-3.0 cm. wide; wings falcate, with a short basal appendage, 16-20 mm. long, 4-5 mm. wide; keels obliquely spatulate, connate by their inner margins, recurved, 18-20 mm. long, 9 to 16 mm. wide. *Stamens* 10, diadelphous, about 2.5 cm. long; anthers uniform, globose to ovoid. *Pistil* 2.3-2.8 cm. long; ovary oblong up to 1.5 cm. long, tomentose; style linear, smooth; stigma terminal obconic. *Legumes* flat, linear, 9-16 cm. long, 6-8 mm. wide; stalk up to 7 cm., tomentose; margins ridged, sparingly puberulous; tip acicular 10-15 mm. long; seeds exalbuminous, about 5 mm. long, 4 mm. wide, slightly kidney-shaped glossy, blotched; hilum prominent (plate I).

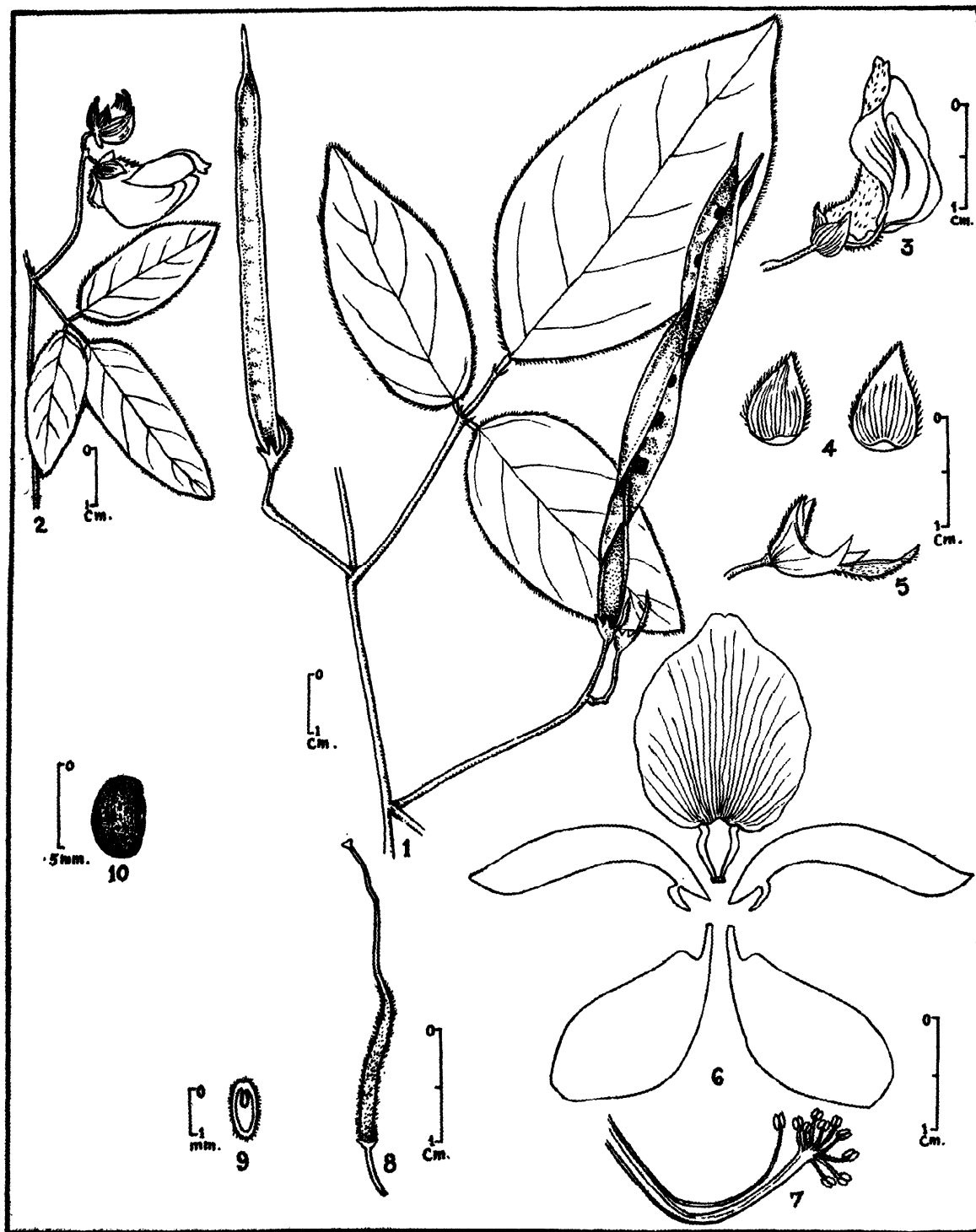


Plate 1: *Centrosema virginianum* Benth.
 1. Twig with two pods. 2. Young shoot with flowers. 3. A flower. 4. Bracteoles. 5. Calyx.
 6. Petals. 7. Stamens. 8. Pistil. 9. T. S. of Ovary. 10. Seed.

SPECIMENS CITED

KERALA STATE—Tenmalai forest division: K. N. Subramanian, Vandalodu, 70438; Nagamalai Road, 63326; Moolakayam on Umayar river bank, 70581; Talapara reserve forests, Arienkavu range, 71081; Kazhuthurutty river bank, 76926. MYSORE STATE—Coorg forests: B. M. Wadhwa 48886.

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